



RSTV Big Picture: COVID-19: Role of World Health Organisation

Context:

After accusing the World Health Organization (WHO) over its handling of the covid-19 and its bias towards China, USA **halted the funding to the WHO.**

Criticism of WHO:

- While most countries closed down air travel at the first stage, the WHO for a long time took a stand against travel and trade restrictions on China.
- According to senior officials in the National Centre for Disease Control, in January when cases were piling up in China, there was a meeting in Delhi in which WHO officials brushed aside government concerns saying there is no human to human transmission.
- It took till about the middle of January for WHO to suggest human-to-human transmission of the virus, **toeing the China line** for the first few weeks of the year, as per reports.
- Even then, in the first two weeks of the year and two weeks after it was notified of the virus, WHO had qualified its statement by saying there was no clear evidence of such transmission.

WHO funding:

- It is **funded by a large number of countries, philanthropic organisations, United Nations organisations** etc.
- According to information uploaded by WHO:
 - Voluntary donations from member states contribute 35.41%,
 - Assessed contributions are 15.66%,
 - Philanthropic organisations account for 9.33%,
 - UN organisations contribute about 8.1%;
 - The rest comes from myriad sources.
- The US contributes almost 15% of the WHO's total funding and almost 31% of the member states' donations, the largest chunk in both cases.
- **India contributes 1% of member states' donations.**
- Countries decide how much they pay and may also choose not to.
- The total funds for the 2020-2021 biennium included \$957 million in assessments and \$4.9 billion in voluntary contributions.

Utilization of WHO funds:

- The WHO is involved in various programmes. For example, polio eradication, increasing access to essential health and nutrition services, vaccine preventable diseases and prevention and control of outbreaks.
- The decision on which country gets how much depends on the situation in the countries.
- The Africa countries received \$1.6 bn for WHO projects; and South East Asia (including India) received \$375 mn.
- The Americas received \$62.2 mn for WHO projects.
- The annual programme of work is passed by WHO's decision-making body, the World Health Assembly.

Impact of the USA's stand

- USA's stand negatively impact WHO's functioning given the significant contribution the U.S. makes
- However, Congressional Democrats have said that President does not have the authority to stop funding and is criticising WHO as a means to deflect criticism of how he has handled the crisis.

WHO and India

- India became a party to the WHO Constitution on January 12, 1948.
- The WHO India Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) 2019-2023 has been developed jointly by the Health Ministry and the WHO India country office.
- WHO has been a key partner in the immunisation programme, tackling TB and neglected diseases such as leprosy and kalaazar, and nutrition programmes across states.



How have WHO and India worked together in the COVID-19 pandemic?

- WHO has been working closely with Ministry of Health and various state governments on **preparedness and response measures for COVID-19, including surveillance and contact tracing; laboratory and research protocols; risk communications; hospital preparedness; training on infection prevention and control and cluster containment plan.**

Pandemic Preparedness

- A pandemic occurs when a new virus capable of causing severe disease transmit easily among humans.
- Since there is no immunity to a newly emerging virus in the human population, it can cause a pandemic.
- While it is impossible to predict with accuracy when a pandemic might occur or its exact impact, the potential for widespread human infection – accompanied by severe illness and death – cannot be dismissed.
- Preparation can mitigate the direct health, social and economic impacts of a pandemic.
- WHO recommends that **each country and area has in place a pandemic preparedness plan.**
- The planning process should involve a broad spectrum of government ministries and agencies, as well as civil society.
- WHO has the responsibility to assist its Member States in developing their preparedness plans.
- WHO has drafted **conventions for preventing the international spread of disease, such as sanitary and quarantine requirements.**
- WHO is also authorized to **issue global health alerts** and take other measures to prevent the international spread of health threats.
- The organization contributes to international public health in areas including disease prevention and control, promotion of good health, addressing disease outbreaks, initiatives to eliminate diseases and development of treatment and prevention standards.

WHO:

- WHO is a **United Nations specialised agency created in 1948.**
- It is headquartered in **Geneva.**
- The organisation was founded to coordinate and direct the UN's global health effort.
- It has no authority over its **194-member countries** and depends on member contributions to carry out its work.
- The WHO incorporated the assets, personnel, and duties of the League of Nations' Health Organisation.
- Its flagship publication, the **World Health Report**, provides expert assessments of global health topics and health statistics on all nations.
- The **World Health Assembly**, composed of representatives from all 194 member states, serves as the agency's supreme decision-making body.
- It also elects and advises an **Executive Board** made up of 34 health specialists.
- As of 2018, it has a budget of over **\$4.2 billion.**
- The agency is part of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Group.**
- The objective of the World Health Organization shall be the **attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.**
- To achieve its objective, the **functions** of the Organization shall be:
 - ❖ to act as the *directing and co-ordinating authority* on international health work;
 - ❖ to *establish and maintain effective collaboration* with the United Nations, specialized agencies, governmental health administrations, professional groups and such other organizations as may be deemed appropriate;
 - ❖ to *assist governments* in strengthening health services;
 - ❖ to *furnish appropriate technical assistance*;
 - ❖ to provide or assist in providing, upon the request of the United Nations, health services and facilities to special groups, such as the peoples of trust territories ;
 - ❖ to establish and maintain such *administrative and technical services* as may be required, including epidemiological and statistical services;
 - ❖ to *stimulate and advance work to eradicate epidemic, endemic and other diseases* ;



- ❖ to promote, in co-operation with other specialized agencies where necessary, the prevention of accidental injuries, the improvement of nutrition, housing, sanitation, recreation, economic or working conditions and other aspects of environmental hygiene;
- ❖ to promote *co-operation among scientific and professional groups* which contribute to the advancement of health;
- ❖ to *propose conventions, agreements and regulations*, and make recommendations concerning international health matters and to perform such duties as may be assigned thereby to the Organization and are consistent with its objective;
- ❖ to promote *maternal and child health and welfare* and to foster the ability to live harmoniously in a changing total environment;
- ❖ to foster activities in the field of *mental health*, especially those affecting the harmony of human relations;
- ❖ to *promote and research in the field of health*;
- ❖ to promote improved *standards of teaching and training* in the health, medical and related professions;
- ❖ to study and report on, in co-operation with other specialized agencies where necessary, administrative and social techniques affecting public health and medical care from preventive and curative points of view, including hospital services and social security;
- ❖ to provide *information, counsel and assistance* in the field of health;
- ❖ to assist in developing an *informed public opinion* among all people on matters of health;
- ❖ to establish and revise as necessary *international nomenclatures of diseases*, of causes of death and of public health practices;
- ❖ to *standardize diagnostic procedures* as necessary;
- ❖ to *develop, establish and promote international standards* concerning food, biological, pharmaceutical and similar products.

SOURCES:

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